

STATE PLANNING OFFICE NEWSLETTER

Current News and Updates for Municipal Officials

Maine State Planning Office 38 State House Station Augusta ME 04333 Web: www.maine.gov/spo Tel: 207-287-6077

\$1 million pilot fosters joint ventures

What are the projected savings?

Regional efficiency grants funded this spring are underway in regions across the state to implement joint ventures for delivering local services.

The projects will provide valuable information to understand better how regionalization will help reduce property taxes. While it is early yet to assess the effectiveness of the regional grants awarded, there are some early indications that savings will be forthcoming — in time.

Grant applicants told us that regionalization provides more efficiencies than it does cost savings, at least in the short run. While every applicant indicated there would be property tax savings as a result of their project, many indicated

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these would be in the form of avoided future budget increases. Others said the efficiencies would be achieved through upgrades in services. One grantee for example said, that by sharing a mechanic, the towns would have an improved and more regular maintenance schedule, thus extending vehicle life.

Please see *Savings* on page 8

Commission looks at regionalism

At a recent two-day retreat of the Intergovernmental Advisory Commission (IAC), representatives of state, local, regional, and county government convened in Orono to rethink the way Maine delivers government services. Their goal is to look at how services are delivered and to make recommendations on how they might be delivered more efficiently within and among the levels of government.

The Legislature created the IAC to foster intergovernmental cooperation. At their retreat, a panel of local and regional officials offered

"We'd hoped there would be a gold mine of savings. There are some, but they are not huge. What regionalization can do however is provide better service, more dependability, better coverage; and staff is safer and better trained... There is better value for money."

-- Nat Tupper, Town Manager, Yarmouth

Please see *Commission* on page 7

Director's Column

By Martha Freeman



There are four things on my mind this month.

One is my appreciation for those who organized and participated in the Land Use Summit the State Planning Office held in Orono in August. I want to thank

SPO's Land Use Team for pulling together all the pieces for a helpful, multi-party, two-day discussion of growth management and comprehensive plan reviews.

Even more, I appreciate the summit attendance by many with different perspectives. Planners, town councilors, regional officials, citizens, and more came to the conference and created a lively agenda. Your thoughts are invaluable as we, together, move ahead to make growth management work for all involved. We've published the summit proceedings, and will be doing more to gather input.

Second on my mind is regionalization, in part because interest in regional approaches to land use planning was a major theme arising from the summit. In addition, regionalization may be a topic in the upcoming gubernatorial campaign. That's great. It's an important subject, from land use, to school administration, to state, county, and municipal government organization.

Governor Baldacci has led progress on regionalization in Maine. The Essential Programs

and Services (EPS) school funding formula will help move regionalization forward in ways that preserve the character and quality of Maine education. A Governor's study of correctional facilities and services is identifying benefits of improved cooperation between state and county governments. And this past spring, the Administration announced \$1 million in grants to 121 municipalities to support regional service delivery and feasibility studies.

Third is the Land for Maine's Future bond that voters will consider in November. As land values increase and development gobbles up our rural places, there is an urgent need to protect many of our assets that are most at risk...farmland, working waterfronts, sustainable forests, and recreational lands. And we must do it now. The buying power of our money is half what it was in 1999, and will be half as much again in five more years.

Finally, related to all of the above, is Maine's experience with the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. In voting to keep the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Limestone finance and accounting service open, BRAC members cited the facilities' excellent workforces, productivity, and labor-management relations. Overcoming those closure recommendations show that quality and innovation, coupled with Maine's traditions of hard work and frugality, can lead our state to success in a 21st Century economy.

Employees at Portsmouth and Limestone developed new and efficient ways to do their jobs, and separated themselves from their competitors. We must apply that ethic to all we do in Maine—from land use, to regionalization, to land preservation to workplace practices. In so doing, we'll keep showing the world how special a place Maine, and its people, are.

Bond funding for Land for Maine's Future will protect key lands on which many Maine workers depend for their livelihood.

Summit kicks off comprehensive plan review process

In a land use summit convened by the State Planning Office in Orono on August 9–10, an array of citizens, professional planners, and local officials developed over 60 proposals to improve land use planning in Maine.

The nearly 100 participants also ordered their proposals in priority order, with the first priority being the need for stronger regional planning (see related article on page 4). In addition, participants called for better protection of local natural resources, greater flexibility in local land use planning, and increased funding for planning.

Full proceedings of the summit are available on line at <http://www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/>. The proceedings describe in detail the proposals conceived during the two-day open space event, as well as a list of issues that SPO wants to explore further. Some of these include:

- Should there be a hierarchy of reviews, with town plans reviewed at a regional level and regional plans reviewed at a state level?
- Should there be a more formula-based plan for

towns that want to adopt land use ordinances but don't have the growth to warrant a full-scale comprehensive plan?

- Should certification criteria be developed that would allow qualified cities and towns to do their own plan reviews?
- Should the content of plans be customized or weighted based on the relevance of each state goal in a community?

In addition, SPO proposes to make three immediate changes based on what we heard at the summit:

1. Post sample comprehensive plans to our Web site. We'll find good examples of plans and sections of plans from rural, suburban and developing towns, and service centers that can serve as models for others.
2. Develop a short, *most frequent inconsistencies* handout that will also be available on our Web site.
3. Commit to deliver comprehensive plan review findings, draft findings, or comments on submitted plans in person.

Please see *Land Use* on p. 7

Growing Maine's rural economies through nature tourism

This month, Governor Baldacci received recommendations from FERMATA, Inc., a Texas-based firm specializing in fostering nature tourism.

Following a year-long assessment in three pilot regions of the state, FERMATA concluded that Maine's diverse natural, cultural, and historical assets can serve as a unique resource for local economic development, particularly in rural economies. As demographics change across the country, Maine tourism operators can take advantage of a growing number of people who are looking for the type of experiential tourism that

Maine has to offer. FERMATA recommends that Maine develop themed trails connecting our cultural and historical offerings to our natural resources, supported with maps, signs, educational materials, and infrastructure. Combined with efforts to develop a diversity of authentic, locally produced products and services (including capitalizing on the cache of the Maine Guide) geared to the tastes of this new traveler, we have much to gain from the business of nature. A summary of the FERMATA report is available on line at <http://www.fermatainc.com/maine/index.html>.

REGIONAL GRANT FUNDING SUSPENDED

During the last legislative session, the 122nd Maine Legislature adopted a process for distributing grants through the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services. Funding for this grant program was established as part of the School Finance Act of 2003, the citizens' initiative known as Question 1A and *Public Law 2005, c. 2*, commonly referred to as LD 1. The program was anticipated to start on November 1, 2005 with the first round of grants through this funding process awarded in early 2006. In June 2005, however, funding for the grant program was suspended for FY 06–07 to close a \$450 million budget gap.

SMALL FUND AVAILABLE FOR REGIONAL GRANTS

The State Planning Office has a small grant program to support promising regional initiatives. *Regional Challenge Grants* are non-competitive and range from \$5,000–\$15,000.

In the past these grants have funded:

- A consolidation study resulting in several regional initiatives between Cumberland, Falmouth, Freeport, North Yarmouth, and Yarmouth.
- In Southern Maine, a planning process for reviewing large-scale development proposals with regional impact.
- A grant to Millinocket, East Millinocket, Medway, and Woodville to help with consolidation; resulting in a shared superintendent and, most recently, with the successful combining of their recreation departments.
- The Sagadahoc Regional Rural Resource Initiative; a regional approach to land use to protect open space and natural resources in the southern mid-coast area.

For more information: visit our Web site at: www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/finassist/.

SPO CREATES WEB SITE FOR REGIONAL INFORMATION

SPO has created a Web site as one way to share information with communities that want to collaborate. The site provides information about what other communities are doing; links to sites of interest; articles, reports, and studies; sample interlocal agreements; and information on study commissions, like the Corrections Alternatives Advisory Committee, which is looking at ways to improve collaboration between state and county government and at restructuring and regionalization opportunities.

We know that there are many creative ideas being studied and implemented by towns and cities across the state that will result in efficiencies in the way local services are delivered. We hope that these projects can be shared with others. Please e-mail jody.harris@maine.gov and let us know of your efforts.

For information: www.maine.gov/spo/sp/regional.

SUMMIT CALLS FOR REGIONAL LAND USE PLANNING

At last month's land use planning summit convened by SPO in Orono (see related article on page 3) planners, local officials, citizens, and legislators agreed that we need to manage land use in Maine on a regional scale.

The impacts of development go beyond geographic boundaries. They asserted that the ability to create affordable housing, to foster new growth, to protect public water supplies, and to improve transportation safety would be better addressed on a region-wide basis, rather than by each individual town, as is now required by law.

The call for a regional approach to managing land was voted the highest priority by those attending the summit.

UPCOMING EVENTS

19th Annual Blaine House Conference on Volunteerism: October 13, 2005, Augusta Civic Center.

www.volunteermaine.org/bhcv2005/index.php

Meeting of the Intergovernmental Advisory Commission: October 17, 2005, State House, Augusta (location TBA).

Maine Recycles Week: November 8–15, 2005.

<http://www.state.me.us/spo/recycle/mrw/>

NEW STATE ECONOMIST NAMED



Catherine J. Reilly has been appointed to the position of state economist at SPO.

OPERATION KEEP ME WARM

As winter approaches, Operation Keep ME Warm gears up for a second year. The program, an initiative to help some of Maine's most vulnerable citizens prepare for the cold winter months, is the first of its kind public-private partnership that matches volunteers with Mainers who have pre-qualified for weatherization assistance. Volunteer teams led by businesses, clubs, lodges, unions, schools, trade associations, and church groups will weatherize at least 3,000 homes between October 28–31. The Maine Commission for Community Service, housed at SPO, is coordinating the volunteer effort. For more information:

www.volunteermaine.org/specialactivities/keepmewarm2005/index.php



Maine's oldest, statewide professional conference for volunteer management

SOLID WASTE TASK FORCE CONVENED

SPO's task force to look at Maine's waste management policies has begun its work. The task force will review current policy issues and will provide input to SPO on whether these policies are still appropriate in light of the technical, management, and other changes that may have occurred over time. The task force is not a consensus group, rather an opportunity to hear differing viewpoints from a representative group.

A task force is required to be convened every five years. SPO will summarize the task force deliberations and provide recommendations in a report to the Governor, Legislature, and DEP in January 2006. To offer input, see a schedule of meetings, or read an assessment of the policy issues that will be taken up, visit our Web site at: <http://www.state.me.us/spo/recycle/policy/>.

SPO NAMES EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



Sue Baker's service to customers and positive attitude makes her SPO's employee of the year. Sue is a planner with the Maine Floodplain Management Program.

Voters to consider bonds

An \$83 million bond package will be put before voters in November. The package includes \$12 million for Land for Maine's Future (LMF) with part of that money going towards preserving working waterfronts in a new pilot program.

If the LMF bond passes, it will make available \$2 million for a working waterfront pilot program, \$1 million for farmland protection, \$1 million for water access sites, both coastal and inland, and \$8 million for conservation and recreation lands.

Farmland, Conservation, and Forestry

This past session, the Legislature's Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee established priorities for a new LMF bond:

- Conservation properties in the rapidly developing areas of southern and coastal Maine
- Public access to outdoor recreational lands and trails statewide
- Protection via easement of traditional public access and uses in the northern woods and support for sustainable forestry (limiting fee acquisitions to areas of very high public value)
- Farmland protection to support an economically viable agricultural sector
- Public access to coastal and inland waters
- Highly significant wildlife habitat and ecological areas

A new bond will help protect local and regional assets that are key to maintaining and growing our rural economies — fishing, farming, forestry, and tourism.

\$50 million approved by voters in 1999 has been fully committed to projects underway.

Working Waterfront Access

Residential and retail development of commercial waterfronts impedes access by fishermen to their fishing waters. In response, the Legislature will ask voters to consider a program of grants to fishermen or fishing cooperatives to, first, keep working waterfront properties in private ownership, but also to provide an option for municipal or public ownership of wharves or other fishing infrastructure. Administered by LMF, the funds would bridge the gap between what fishermen can reasonably finance and what the market currently asks for working waterfront properties.

Jobs and Infrastructure Investment

Voters will also consider four other bond questions, including:

Transportation: \$33.1M for public transportation infrastructure, including replenishing the small harbor improvements (SHIP) grant program.

Environment: \$8.9M for developing an agriculture irrigation system and for grants and loans to upgrade public wastewater treatment and water systems.

Jobs: \$20M to stimulate economic growth and job creation, including marine research and development; biomedical R&D, and capital improvements to cultural resources.

Education: \$9M to make building renovations at UM, USM, and Maine Community College campuses.

For more information:

www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/2004elec.htm

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The next steps include taking a more in-depth look at some of the specific proposals generated at the summit. SPO intends a number of research techniques and public forums:

Research: SPO staff will look at what other states are doing, explore legal questions, and study the impact of summit proposals.

Focus Groups: Market Decisions, Inc. will conduct five research focus groups of local officials in differing size towns and regions to explore summit proposals in-depth.

Interviews: Market Decisions, Inc. will interview 20–25 professional Maine planners and state agency partners in separate sessions.

Community Preservation Advisory Committee: SPO will present preliminary proposals to CPAC for discussion.

Goal of Focus Group Research

Focus groups allow researchers to probe people's views on identified issues. To be effective, the setting must be safe, comfortable, and closed. In part this is so participants' responses are not knowingly or unknowingly biased or tailored to an audience or particular interest.

Public Input: Once proposals are refined, public meetings and comment periods to get feedback will be scheduled. Throughout the review process, SPO is soliciting public comment through its Web site at: <http://www.state.me.us/spo/landuse/>.

Final Report: A final report with recommendations will be submitted to the Natural Resources Committee by February 1, 2006.

The goal of all this work is to hear from as many people as possible in the time available, and as Martha Freeman has said, "to give questions of change to the people who ultimately must implement that change."

Commission from page 1

examples of their experiences with regional cooperation. The panel consisted of Nat Tupper, Town Manager, Yarmouth; Bob Thompson, Executive Director, Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments; and John Edgecomb, Town Manager of Mapleton, Castle Hill, and Chapman. Their insights set the tone and agenda for the Commission's work. Among their advice was:

- A great deal of regional cooperation is already taking

place in an incremental way. Let's build on that rather than impose a cookie cutter approach from the top.

- A loss of community identity is what drives much of the fear of regionalization. We can expand beyond traditional municipal boundaries, but it takes time to rebuild people's sense of community towards a larger region.
- Multi-municipal cooperation can be stymied by the lack of

standardized data and systems.

- There are upfront costs to consolidate services. Cost savings will not be immediate.
- Consolidation does provide the ability to offer better services to the public and this is as important as cost savings.

The commission's priorities for the upcoming year include advocating to reinstate the regional efficiency grants, convening a summit, and standardizing data collection for interoperability.

State Planning Office
38 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333

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State Planning Office

38 State House Station
Augusta ME 04333

<http://www.maine.gov/spo>

Phone:

207.287.6077

E-Mail:

linda.c.laplante@maine.gov



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Savings from page 1

The most common (and largest) savings that grantees cited was personnel costs, followed by lower operating and equipment expenses from shared programs.

In combination, applicants of the 26 grant projects funded this spring said their first year savings would be \$2 million and projected \$6 million in savings over three years. While it will take several years for us to know whether these projections are borne out, there clearly are efficiencies to be gained from regional delivery of local services.

The efficiency grants were funded by a state budget appropriation in 2003 and served as a pilot for grants to be distributed from the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services that was recently suspended.

"There is something in between total annexation and sharing of services. I can't believe we can't find a way to join together and become more successful."

*--John Edgecomb, Town Manager of Mapleton, Castle Hill, and
Chapman*

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[*linda.c.laplante@maine.gov*](mailto:linda.c.laplante@maine.gov)
